TRANSCRIPT—JOYCE FERGUSON

Interviewee: Joyce Ferguson

Interviewer: Sharon Fahrer

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Sharon Fahrer: Tell me your name and when you were born and where you were born and where you live now.

Joyce Ferguson: My name is Joyce Ferguson. I was born September 27, 1950. I lived in Asheville all my life. I've been gone for about forty years. I reside now in Charlotte, North Carolina.

SF: That's not so far.

JF: No, that's not so far. I still have family here. I have two brothers and two sisters here. And some nieces and nephews.

SF: What neighborhood did you grow up in?

JF: The neighborhood I grew up in was West Asheville. But we eventually moved to East End. From East End, I was attending—I never did attend our elementary schools in East End, at that time I was going to Hill Street. From Hill Street I came to Stephens-Lee as a

freshman and from there I went to South French Broad. And there's where I graduated in 1968.

SF: Did some of your family go to Stephens-Lee?

JF: No, I've had relatives that went there. I had some cousins that had gone to Stephens-Lee.

SF: But no older brothers or sisters. Living part of your time in the neighborhood of Stephens-Lee, what was that like? Did you come to the football games?

JF: I wasn't into sports so I didn't come to football games or anything. I guess my mother just didn't allow us to do that sort of thing. But because it was in the neighborhood, and I lived in East End, I walked to school. I didn't have a bus. I don't think she even had a car back then. It was a neighborhood school so I walked to school.

SF: So when you got to Stephens-Lee, what kind of activities were you involved in?

JF: Activities were none, because I was a freshman. My first year, it was a little intimidating, when you're in a new school and a new class and a lot of upperclassmen like to play jokes on the freshman, kind of like an initiation period. So they would do a lot of prank jokes. And you wouldn't tell on them. You could be sitting in class and you're sitting behind someone and you brought your lunch that day, and one of the upperclassmen might ease up there and take that lunch. With you being a freshman, you're not going to say anything because then they're going to be after you. So you keep your mouth closed. But they did a lot of pranks.

SF: Like what else did they do?

JF: Well, for me, I had dropped some money in the hallway and I'll never forget, one of the seniors just walked up and put their foot on it. Back then the economy was different so a quarter was a lot of money. So that would've been maybe 1965. They put their foot on it and I told them to move their foot because they was on my quarter, and they slid their foot which moved the quarter and said, 'No, there's nothing there.' So it was either have a confrontation or just go on about your business so I went about my business.

SF: Was that your lunch money?

JF: Yes, it was my lunch money. But that individual, as I still remember now, is a minister. So he turned from being a prankster to being a minister. And he still resides here in Asheville.

SF: Maybe he was repenting for his negative ways.

JF: And he turned completely around.

SF: What kind of feeling did you have when you came to Stephens-Lee?

JF: When I came to Stephens-Lee back then, there really wasn't the feelings, just like leaving Hill Street and going to another school. I knew some of the teachers because they attended my church which was within walking distance and still is.

SF: What church did you go to?

JF: I haven't been there in so long. Nazareth First Baptist. Which is within walking distance of here. Our minister Reverend Dunn's wife taught here. So I remember her, I remember Mrs. Belton. The principal, that's Mr. Belton. I remember Mr. Belton and Mrs. Belton.

SF: Mrs. Belton was a teacher?

JF: Yes, she was a teacher and he was the principal. I know Mrs. Burton quite well, because she went to South French Broad. Mr. King. Oh, Mrs. Foster, Mr. Fair. I lived next door to Mr. Fair, on Grail Street. All of these teachers were at South French Broad. Mr. Sherrill. He went to Asheville High years later. Now Charles Smith is someone that I don't recognize. I don't know if he went elsewhere or not. Mr. Haith. Oh, Mr. Cowan, the Math teacher. I knew him well. Mrs. Chappelle, Mrs. Hall. Now this one I don't recognize, Mrs. Clark. Mrs. Williams. Oh, Mr. Moore. Now Mrs. Moore, she was a teacher as well but I don't know if she taught at Stephens-Lee or if she was at Hill Street. I remember Mr. Moore and Mr. Hammonds, he's still living. My nephews, they—he coached so they played football under him. Mrs. Dempsey, This is Reverend Dunn's wife, Mrs. Dunn. I remember I was in her study hall one time and I was good after that. Not that I was a bad child or anything. Mrs. Nunn—Miss Nunn. Miss Reynolds, Music teacher there. Oh, Lucy Mae Harrison, I remember her. She used to invite you to her house and cook. And she was not a good cook, so what I would do is I would go there and eat and when she was not looking, I would spit it in the napkin. She was not a good cook but she was always inviting you to her house. She didn't catch on. Good teacher, yes, but cook, no.

SF: What did she teach?

JF: I can't remember what she taught.

SF: I hope it wasn't Home Ec.

JF: It was not. And Mrs. Eubanks, I remember her. She's deceased. A lot of them here are deceased. Now Wilma Epps I do not recognize her. Mrs. Holt, I remember her. Oh, Mrs. Rumley. These names bring back memories. See how young they are? Mr. Dusenberry. See, if you didn't know these people you'd probably have a hard time pronouncing some of these names. Dusenberry.

SF: What do you remember about him?

JF: I can't remember too much about him. I remember that he had a son that was in school the same time I was. He was under me. That's amazing to be a teacher and have a child in the same school. But, I recognize all of these people. Except for this gentlemen here. I don't remember him at all.

SF: Charles Smith?

JF: Yes. I don't remember him at all but all these other teachers, I do remember.

SF: What kind of classes did you take in high school?

JF: In high school I took the basics, the History and English, Math. There was no special classes because I wasn't in no special group. They played basketball. Of course we took gym and all. But there was no special class.

SF: So after you graduated what did you do?

JF: After I graduated I didn't go on to college or anything like a lot of my classmates did. I went to work. I worked at Square D for a while. And during that time, let's see, I graduated in sixty-eight, it could have been in 1970, and back then people were very prejudiced, and what I learned from working there is that our manager whose name was Mr. Penland, I'm sure he's dead and gone, he was a White supervisor, if he didn't like you, he would kind of set you up to be fired. And I saw him do it twice to two Black individuals. And I thought, 'I've got to get out of here because I might be next.' So I worked there probably about a year and a half, so I left and I went to work for First Union back in the day. The bank. I worked there and I just retired, so I worked there for over forty-three years, three months from being there forty-four years.

SF: So you worked your way up.

JF: I worked my way up.

SF: Did you to college eventually?

JF: No. I never went to college or trade school or anything. It was just that somebody was willing to give me a chance because back then, in the Banking world, there wasn't any hiring of any Blacks. You were really like a token. In Asheville, we didn't have too many tokens. I can right now say three tokens. I would say less than five, let's put it that way. In Banking, on the retail level, which means in the branches. Now behind the scenes, at the service center, I don't know. But on the retail side, in the branches, they would not

hire two Blacks, you'd never find two Blacks in the same branch. Never. It was always one, there was always a token. So I was the token for a while and when I moved to Charlotte, it was like a cloud opened up. Everything was totally different. I'd go into a branch and there might be more Blacks than Whites. It was just amazing. And then too, women could not have management jobs. They do not believe in female managers. It was all men, not matter if they were Black or White. They were just men. But things have really changed. My year at Stephens-Lee was good. I went here one year and I did enjoy it and I'm just part of that legacy. I graduated from South French Broad. I loved the way you did this right here.

SF: Zoe did that. She made that exhibition.

JF: I guess you got the pictures out of the yearbook.

SF: Yes, but we're doing a timeline for the wall out there. I'll show you what it's going to look like, just the concept of it. This is what it's going to look like, it's have the time and then a lot of pictures. So we're looking for pictures that we can scan. We're creating a collection at the Pack Library. And we're scanning all the yearbooks, so we're looking for old yearbooks.

JF: I have two yearbooks but not back in the Stephens-Lee time, they'd be Asheville High.

SF: But maybe you have older relatives that might have some or maybe they have pictures and it doesn't have to be actually at the school but maybe they have pictures of a

football game or a meeting or something like that. We're looking for anything related to that.

JF: So was 1965 the last year that it was over? Wow. That's been a long time ago. Over fifty-some years.

SF: Did you have a different feeling when you—you know, here you were finally at Stephens-Lee that was the big school and then you went to South French Broad. Was there any kind of letdown?

JF: No, it wasn't a letdown. The only thing that I would—the band. Stephens-Lee had the best marching band there was. The football team was great. I didn't go to any of the games but I always saw them march in the Christmas Parade. And that kind of faded away. I think it was Mr. Lennon who was the Band Director at that time. I missed that part of it, but that's about it. I guess mostly I wasn't connected because it was just one year. If I had been here four years, or three years, it'd have been different. There would have been a tie, a bond there. But that one year, you were just like making it through. Somebody would prank me or mess with me. But it was a good year.

SF: What it feel like to be in the school? Was it old, was it dark, was it overwhelming, because it was big?

JF: When I look back it was odd then because it was big. And the gym—because we had to go in the gym and meet for various reasons, the gym was just huge. So that part was overwhelming, the school itself. I didn't think about the history of it when I went there,

even though it was the last year, it was just like when people are doing their ancestry they're going back and back. If you don't do it at the right time with certain people living, you don't really get that far with the history. At that time, I didn't think about the history even though it was closing. I don't know if a lot of people got a brick or something to remind them of Stephens-Lee, I didn't do any of that. My transition was the next year, went to a new school.

SF: So when you graduated from South French Broad, was it integrated yet?

JF: No, it integrated in 1970. I think sixty-nine would be the last class there before it went to Asheville High.

SF: Do you think that was a good thing?

JF: Oh, yes. I think it was a good thing. Because some kids was already going to the White schools, but because they lived in that side of town. Because I lived in West Asheville, and when I went to Hill Street, a lot of the kids at that school was going to, I think Hall Fletcher out there. So really, if I look back, some of the schools were integrated with a few Blacks. Only a few, but not completely until 1970. Some of my classmates I know didn't go to Hill Street. We lived in West Asheville.

SF: So why wouldn't you go to Hall Fletcher?

JF: I don't know. I just never questioned it. One of the kids I went to school with, Norman McGahey, he didn't go to Hill Street, he went to Hall Fletcher. And would have been probably walking distance for them. But for some reason, I went to Hill Street for

one year, so I would've been in the eighth grade there. Back then they had just neighborhood schools. Now when I came to Stephens-Lee, there was a lot of kids being bused in. They were coming from Black Mountain and Swannanoa and probably Shiloh. They were being bused in but then they did away with that, so that had to go to their nearby schools.

SF: That's when they had to integrate.

JF: Right. But at South French Broad when I graduated, it was not integrated.

SF: So this is the time of civil rights, did you feel like you should have been integrated, did you feel like you shouldn't have been integrated? Did you feel like you were more comfortable being in an all-black school?

JF: At that time I was just comfortable because I guess I didn't think about it at that time. I lived a very straight and narrow life, there was home and school and back home. As I got older and was able to work, it was home, school, work. I took this class called D.E. or something. Distributive Education, and they would help you get jobs, so my life was just one-two-three: home, school, work and back home. So I didn't politically get involved in anything of that nature that was going on.

SF: Were people taking about it at school?

JF: Well, no. If they were, I wasn't with that group of people.

SF: Because there was ASCORE and they had integrated the library.

JF: At one time it seemed there was a riot and that could have been when I was in my senior class because I think the guy that was hit in part of it, his last name was Ferguson. He's in Charlotte now because he's an attorney there.

SF: Yeah, he's an important attorney.

JF: There was demonstrations during that time but I didn't participate in them. Now, my sister did. She was younger than I was. I guess for me, I probably was more quiet and reserved so I didn't get involved in things like that but I know she did. And she was like three years younger than me.

SF: Do you miss anything about Asheville since you haven't lived here in so long?

JF: I don't miss anything. My mother lived with me before she passed for two years and I'm still taking care of my grandmother, she's a hundred and eight. And I've had her for ten years. So I have siblings here but because of my grandmother, I still stay pretty close to home, but when I do come like in this situation, I look around and so much has changed. I look at the nightlife downtown, which is totally different than even Charlotte, because I don't go downtown in Charlotte. The nightlife and people, even neighborhoods that was predominantly Black neighborhoods, they're not predominantly Black and the ones that were predominantly White are not. You can live anywhere you want to, as long as you can pay the rent or buy the house. People in the East End, I haven't been over there lately but I'm sure there's as many Whites as there are Blacks. They're just everywhere, things have totally changed. It's for the better too. It's called unity and we all just get along.

SF: Well, you know, I don't want to get into the politics of it, but I'm just saying, there's a lot of politics still here about that. The Black community has—.

JF: That's how they feel on both sides. It's not cut and dried equal down the middle. You got the good people and you got the bad people. I'm not going to be like Trump and say there's good on both sides. He flip flops.

SF: Well, thank you for taking the time. Is your 108-year-old grandmother from Asheville?

JF: She's originally from Blair, South Carolina but she lived in Asheville most of her life. I know she has lived here over sixty-five years.

SF: Did you get some of her stories?

JF: Well, you know, she's got Alzheimer's and dementia. I used to be writing a lot of stuff down, but after a while I figured some of this stuff can't be true because she talks in the first, second and third person and she can't be three people at one time. But what I'm doing now is I'm reaching out to family members who are still alive who might be able to tell me some things, that are in their eighties and nineties. She's one of fourteen children and she's the last living child, so she's the youngest and the oldest. I'm trying to get information from other family members. As much as I can get out of her, because I know when she goes I can pass it out to my children and relatives so they'll know.

SF: I'll just put a plug in, that's why it's important to create this collection at the library because then all generations will always be able to know about it and that's why we're

doing the time line, because you all know the history but what about your grandchildren? How are they going to know.

JF: You are exactly right. Because my grandmother, when I talk to her, if I don't talk to her too much, she will tell things. She was telling me the other day about something her daddy had told her on his dying bed, and I didn't say anything or ask her questions, I just listened and then by me listening, then I passed it on to my sister so that she would know. Just little things like that. I just hate that I waited so long because my mama, she's been gone eight years now, probably could have told me more about the family.

SF: We all feel like that. That's why we're trying not to let that happen.

JF: Do it now when there's people that can tell you something. I don't know, out of all these people here, I couldn't tell you who's living.

SF: There's about three faculty living and one of them has dementia.

JF: Mr. Hammonds I know is one. He's still living. Because he married a student way after she had got out of school. I remember that because they're still married now. He's the only I one that I know is still living.

SF: I think we know of two or three but one had dementia so—. So you just moved from Asheville to Charlotte?

JF: I moved from Asheville to Raleigh, stayed there a few years, and then I moved to Charlotte, just to be closer to home. That's a long drive from Raleigh to Asheville. Now I

can be close to my family and they can be—. But because of my grandmother, I don't come here often, maybe once a year. Unless there's something special going on.

SF: Do you know what neighborhood she lived in?

JF: She lived in West Asheville. I was born around Montford Avenue, because back then my mother, who had eight children, her first child, who's deceased, she had in the hospital, and her last child—.

SF: What hospital I wonder?

JF: Some hospital that's on Asheland Avenue.

SF: Oh, the Colored Hospital maybe.

JF: Do you know where Jesse Ray's Funeral Home used to be? That used to be a hospital back in the day. So her first child was born there and her last child was born there and everyone in between, which includes me, was born at home. There's Stephens-Lee right there. So this must be the gym over here. See, it's been a long time, wow. I don't even remember. Before they tore down Stephens-Lee, I think, I lived on Grail Street, which is right down here somewhere. We were all born and raised in West Asheville until we moved to East End and stayed in East End for a long while until my mother moved back to West Asheville to the projects there. And by that time, we had all grown up and half of us had children and had our own places to live. And that's been a long time. Born in the year 1950.

SF: Okay, thank you for sharing. You did fine. And maybe you can sign the sheet here, that it's okay for us to use this interview in the archives.

END OF INTERVIEW.